

Cal-State Daily Titan: Cal State-Fullerton program gets mixed reviews from campus community

Katie Highland, a student assistant at California State University at Fullerton's Pollak Library, rides her bike to campus three times a week. When she does drive a car, she opts for her hybrid.

"I think it's better," Highland said of riding her bike. "It's good exercise; I'm a bike junkie."

The senior English and philosophy major was unaware that the Commuter Choice Program at CSUF offers monetary incentives for alternative commuters like herself. Designed for full or part-time faculty and staff, the program -- in a nationwide attempt to reduce traffic and lower pollution from car emissions -- includes rewards for campus commuters who carpool, ride a bike, walk or use transit.

"People might not think about [how they get to work]. I know people who work here [in the library] and live closer than I do and drive," Highland said. "I think [alternative commuter programs] help. I think employers have a responsibility to [offer these programs], especially since I work for the state."

Under Rule 2202 of the Southern California Air Quality Management District code, it is not just organizations owned by the state that must provide these kinds of incentives. Any employer with more than 250 employees must offer alternative commuting choices. These alternatives must be offered to employees who drive to work between the peak commute hours of 6 a.m. to 10 a.m.

Specific incentives offered to CSUF employees include: Reserved parking for carpoolers, \$10 to \$21 in Titan Tender each month for walking or riding a bike to campus, and subsidies for riding the bus or vanpooling.

Riding the bus free is one alternative both university employees and students can use to their advantage. Employees on the south wing of the library encode the Titan cards of approximately 70 Orange County Transportation Authority bus riders each day, according to Vivian Valadez, a student assistant who processes these cards.

Valadez, like other employees on campus, drives to work alone from her home in Norwalk, Calif. The only exception to her private commute is the one day each week when she carools with her sister.

"I wouldn't want to drive with someone I don't know," Valadez said of carpooling. "I'd rather come by myself. If I lived closer, I'd probably take the bus."

University faculty and staff who take part in the Commuter Choice Program log their daily commute to campus on a form, which is monthly used to verify eligibility for incentives or subsidies. Registration for the program and eligibility for incentives are all done through CSUF's Parking and Transportation Services.

The monetary incentives are taxed each month as income with the exception of bus and vanpool subsidies.

Despite commuter incentives, some of the university's employees choose not to take part in the Commuter Choice Program and say that the program is ineffective at reducing traffic.

"I think everyone still uses their cars," said Prudence Dacillo, a graduate student in the credential program.

Dacillo works in the Titan Shops and does not take part in the Commuter Choice Program. She gets to campus either by bus or by driving her boyfriend's car and parking on nearby Commonwealth Avenue.

"It's going to take a lot more than that [program] to change things," Dacillo said.

Others believe that programs such as those offered to CSUF employees do aid in reducing traffic.

"Our daily lifestyle and consumption choices have a large impact on environmental quality," said Francisco Arcaute, a spokesman for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, in an e-mail interview. "And even small changes in our everyday routines can lead to greater improvements."

CSUF, along with other universities, such as California State University at Los Angeles and California State University at Dominguez Hills, appear on the Best Workplaces for Commuters list, created by the Partnership for Public Service.

"The Environmental Protection Agency encourages the use of ride-sharing and public mass transportation," Arcaute said. "We fully endorse and support incentives that accomplish this goal since such efforts can reduce traffic congestion, energy consumption and vehicular pollution."

Back in the library at CSUF, Highland voiced an opinion similar to Arcaute's about the positive effects of employers offering alternative commuting options for employees.

As a student assistant, Highland -- along with teaching and graduate assistants -- is not eligible for the university's Commuter Choice Program. She said that she still supports alternative commuting options, not only for environmental reasons, but also because it might get more bike riders out on the road.

"As a bike rider, you want more people riding their bikes," she said. "The more there are of us out there, the more [drivers] will look out for us."